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Life “Under the Dome” Ecclesiastes

Does the names Robert Carr mean anything to you? He was the president of the West Virginia Senate from 1889 to 1891. Although he attained one of the highest positions in the state, few remember him or his accomplishments. All I could find is one sentence in Wikipedia and a picture on the wall. This should remind us of the fleeting nature of success in the capitol. In the wisdom book of Ecclesiastes Solomon shares great wisdom regarding the true nature of success and meaning of life “under the dome”.

As we learned in our previous study, Solomon was a man of great wisdom and accomplishment. He found astounding success and wealth. God Himself spoke of Solomon: **“I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days.” (1 Kings 3:13)** But Solomon turned his back on God. He disobeyed God’s word by marrying foreign women and eventually worshipping their false gods. Although he amassed all the wealth and success that anyone could possibly imagine, he nears the end of his life and realizes that all of it is meaningless and empty! This is the experience of which he writes in the book of Ecclesiastes.

The English title, *Ecclesiastes*, comes from the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *Qoheleth* which means “one who calls or gathers an assembly”. It refers to the one who addresses the assembly, so we get the idea of “preacher” (1:1,2; 12:8). Quite simply, Solomon is calling us together in order to give to us a pointed message on the important lessons he has learned in his life!

Key Words in Ecclesiastes

“Vanity”

The theme of this book is wrapped up in this word that is used 38 times. It has the basic meaning of “wind, breath, or vapor” and refers to something that is empty, meaningless or futile. It is quite descriptive of life lived apart from God and His perspective. There are three distinct implications of this word as it is used in this portion of scripture:

Empty or valueless

Throughout the book, Solomon writes of his accumulation of wealth and his accomplishments as

king. He uses a very descriptive phrase to describe the final results of all of it: “grasping for the wind” (1:14, 2:11, 4:4, 6:9). Could there be a more fitting description of the pursuit of earthly riches and achievements apart from God? To work and strive to gain some possession or position, only to find in the end that it cannot satisfy or bring true happiness or meaning to our lives!

Transient or temporary

In light of the fact that our lives last but for a few years, when we are dead and gone, from an earthly perspective, everything that we have accomplished or accumulated will be worthless to us. **2:18 “I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me. ¹⁹ And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will rule over all my labor in which I toiled and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity.”**

Meaningless or senseless

Many of the struggles, questions, and perplexities of life appear to be meaningless if we do not understand them from a biblical perspective. Tragedy, sickness, injustice and oppression can make life seem meaningless. In Ecclesiastes 8:14 Solomon writes: **“There is a vanity which occurs on earth, that there are just men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked; again, there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.”**

“Under the Sun”

This phrase is used 29 times in Ecclesiastes. It refers to all of our life and existence as it takes place here on earth. It speaks of the perspective with which Solomon

is viewing life as he deals with the difficult questions he is asking. Solomon is missing the eternal, spiritual aspect of life. He is looking only at life “under the sun”. He is looking at life from a human perspective and not necessarily from heaven’s point of view. The title for our study this week points out the fact that it is easy to get caught up in “life under the dome” and lose the eternal, spiritual aspect of life while you are serving here in the Capitol.

Meaninglessness of Life Without God

Solomon gives a powerful description of a life lived pursuing earthly wealth and position apart from any eternal perspective in Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

I said to myself, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.” And behold, it too was futility. ² I said of laughter, “It is madness,” and of pleasure, “What does it accomplish?” ³ I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives. ⁴ I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself; ⁵ I made gardens and parks for myself and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees; ⁶ I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees. ⁷ I bought male and female slaves and I had homeborn slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. ⁸ Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men—many concubines.

⁹ Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me. ¹⁰ All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. ¹¹ Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.

The New Testament further describes this important truth:

In Colossians 3:1-4, Paul speaks of the result that our position in Christ should have upon our thinking and our approach to life:

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. ³ For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ *who is our life* appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

When dealing with the difficult issue of the trials and persecution we face in this life, Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:18:

“We do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.”

Conclusion

The application the message of Ecclesiastes is best stated in Solomon’s own closing words in 12:13-14:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Solomon challenges us that all life must be lived in a proper relationship with God and a right response to His word if we are to ever find meaning in life. He goes on to remind us of life’s eternal perspective; that this life “under the sun” is not all there is.

If you have not put your faith in Christ, you are the ultimate expression of living life “under the sun”, ignoring the eternal aspect of your existence. Jesus said in John 10:10 **I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.**

If you are a believer, you may face the temptation of getting caught up in “life under the dome” and missing the eternal perspective of life in the Capitol. I believe one of the greatest purposes of Capitol Commission is to remind us that there is much more to what takes place “under the dome” than the political, governmental, practical activities that go on each day. Are you committed to studying, learning, and applying God’s Word as you serve here each day? Are you burdened to have a testimony and share Christ with those who do not know Him?

Solomon’s purpose is to remind us that living life with a merely earthly, “under the sun” perspective leads only to emptiness, frustration, and futility, while living for God brings the joy and meaning in life each of us desires!

BIBLE STUDIES

Thursdays, 12:00 Noon

MCMANUS (House) CONFERENCE ROOM

(252-M Located by minority offices near House chamber)